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THE CUP OF WAR

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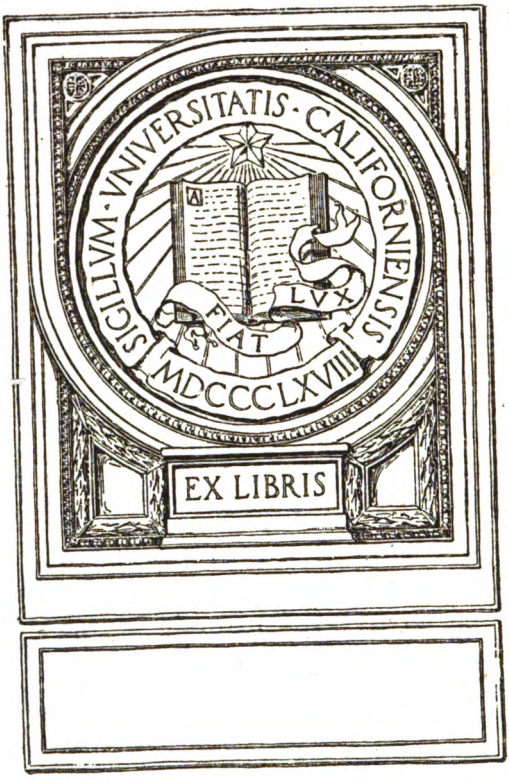

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THE CUP OF WAR

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BY THE SAME AUTHOR

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THE CUP OF WAR

BY THE AUTHOR OF "ESPECIALLY" AND "WAYSIDE LAMPS"

"In the hand of the Lord there is a cup, and the wine is red."

THIRD IMPRESSION

LONGMANS, GREEN AND CO.
39 PATERNOSTER ROW, LONDON
FOURTH AVENUE & 30TH STREET, NEW YORK
BOMBAY, CALCUTTA, AND MADRAS
1915

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TO THE

GREAT HEARTS WHO ARE GLAD

WHEN IT IS TIME TO GIVE

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PREFACE

THOSE who read this slight sketch may think the title unduly great, since it could only describe what my own eyes have seen in sheltered England during the last eight months. Yet I fancy that those who are drinking the Cup of War in Flanders and upon the decks of our ships would agree with me that they do not drink alone—the bitterest drops are for the aching hearts at home. The Cup of War is a great and terrible cup, but nevertheless it is glowing and golden, and its glory should stanch our tears.

Very mundane things may become glorious, even as a pool will reflect the brilliance of the sky, and just now I see glory flashing from the Commodore's signal to his Flotilla as he asks which officers will follow the great example of our King in giving up alcohol for the duration of the

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war, and the answering signals reply "*All.*" Think of the long lonely night watches, the spray-drenched bridge and the bitter wind before the dawn. Think of the stiffened limbs, the aching throats and the straining eyes—and then—no glass of hot grog to hasten the coming of sleep!

. . . . . .

"Draw near together; none be last or first;
We are no longer names but one desire."

. . . . . .

But for the war we had not known there were such giants in these days: their mothers and children and wives may well walk with uplifted heads though sorrow walk beside them. We drink the Cup together.

L. B. B.

SPRING, 1915.

The grateful thanks of the author are given to Sir Henry Newbolt for permission to quote from his wonderful poem "Sacramentum Supremum."

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THE CUP OF WAR

CHAPTER I

"Draw near, my friends; and let your thoughts be high
Great hearts are glad when it is time to give;
Life is no life to him that dares not die,
And death no death to him that dares to live.
Draw near together; none be last or first;
We are no longer names but one desire."

HENRY NEWBOLT.

NOTHING was further from my thoughts on the 26th day of last July than the possibility of war with Germany. There was a drowsy peace in the old-fashioned garden of Government House, and we sat out late in the cool of the evening. The lavender was ready for gathering, and the scent of the soft purple blooms lying piled beside my deck-chair remains in my memory still.

We discussed nothing more vital than the planting and watering of the borders; Chris holding firmly to his opinion that I planted my particular border too closely,

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and that it was no use to water in dry weather unless you deluged, and I pointing out to him with pride and equal decision that no one wants to see bare earth with plants at regular intervals, but when mignonette and alyssum, lobelia and nasturtium run into each other, as mine did, they make a really fine border of colour, and that whether my watering was too scanty or his kind help with the big hose essential, at any rate here was my border close to our chairs, looking extremely well, whereas his own, on the other side of the lawn, presented what a gardener would call a rather spotty effect.

Nothing could have been more peaceful, yet when midnight struck on the old church clock at Harmouth, peace was tolled out. As far as we were concerned, war had begun before the first hour sounded of another day.

Out of the stillness clashed a sudden peal at our backyard bell. It went on ringing and ringing without any decent interval.

"One of the coastguards, please M'm, with a telegram for the Colonel."

"Mobilisation!" said the Colonel, getting out of bed with a bound, and into uniform

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in the dressing-room with such rapidity that I scarcely dared delay him by a word while handing him belt and boots; I have seen him move before, but never as fast as that.

"Mobilisation? but the telegram is cypher?"

"That's what it is, though—just fasten this, dear. I may bring Stephen in for some food later on. Good-bye!" He was gone.

It seemed a pity to get the servants up at 1.15 A.M., so I lit up the house myself and proceeded to collect a scratch meal in the dining-room, and cut some sandwiches for emergencies in the headquarter office, which is mercifully only just across the garden.

About three o'clock Chris came back, conveyed the sandwiches and a drink to his Staff Officer, had some himself, and told me it was going to be WAR—that the telegram was to ask him what troops he required, and that he meant to go to sleep again until five o'clock; and then he did so! My mortal clay is fashioned otherwise, and I lay watching the dawn through the wide open window, and then the clear early sunshine on the calm water of the harbour, pondering European war and what it could

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possibly mean to England, and to our own fort in particular.

I could not grasp it in the very least, and presently wished I could give up the attempt and prepare myself by a sound sleep for whatever heavy work the day might bring, but that being hopeless, I pictured every possible possibility except those which really happened, which were—Chris never sleeping in his own home any more, and Government House being turned into a Staff Mess.

That first day seemed one long meal; officers poured in from all over England, and breakfasts went on until almost lunch, and lunches until nearly tea.

The regiments were to take care of our bit of the coast and then go to France. Several officers happened to have been attending a wedding when the order reached them, and their conversation was largely taken up with descriptions of the rapidity with which they had rushed back, but said little of that to which they would be rushed forward. I listened to them all as I carved the sirloin and ladled out the fruit salad, and I noted their excited voices and eager faces. What *is* before them all, I kept thinking?

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And when I spoke my thought to Chris during a momentary meeting in his room while he changed his boots, he looked up and answered calmly, "What is before them? A big war, in which they will be pretty nearly all wiped out." I turned away in dumb misery—one could but pray for them all—but they were so young, so keen, so happy.

Very soon they were gone—gone to Mons, Le Cateau, the Marne, and the Aisne—and their names came out in the lists very much as Chris had said. I remember the liveliest, rowdiest of them all, so well, who seemed to think life one big joke—and how he kept up all the others' spirits;—he was wounded almost at once and has languished in a German prison ever since. Through much tribulation he must be entering the Kingdom of God—but I would have liked to go to prison in his place.

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CHAPTER II

MEANWHILE, the younger children were having their trunks packed to go off, on a safe inland journey, before the trains became too full. War with Germany meant little to them; but leaving their rabbits to the soldier servant's tender care, and their other pets to me, was a fearful wrench. "Perky and Podgey may be all right," they mourned, "but Infinitesimally is *so* young, Muddis is sure to lose him." Perky the frog, Podgy the toad, and Infinitesimally the infant—which might be either—were a heavy responsibility for anyone in days of peace; in time of war they were likely to look after themselves by disappearing from their tank into the wilderness of the kitchen garden.

Our five-year-old Christian would not admit any surprise at this sudden convulsion of the world.

"You know, Muddis," she said, with an air of patient explanation, "I tolded you the

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other day I dreamed the Germans were come, and that I was just dressin', and was only in my stays, an' I thought *that* won't do to meet Germans in, so I just got back into bed."

They went off all smiles, and somehow Chris fitted in his work to be able to jump out of his car at the station before they started. Christian swarmed up her father's legs and clasped him very tight, and I had to watch the engine rather carefully after a glance at his face. As they waved from the train window I asked him, "Is the news worse?" "Oh no, it's all right, but we are warned to expect attack here, you know." Yes, I knew.

He went back to his office, and I went down the street to order relays of food for our increased table, and to see after the various soldiers' wives who might have to turn out of their quarters.

There had just been a good deal of bother over some moves, and I found myself in the usual predicament of searching for lodgings for women who would probably never live in them when found.

I had discussed the situation with a wise barrack warden, who firmly but politely

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declined to lend, even for one week, any tables or chairs belonging to the barracks; referring me to Form 1001, and to the absolute certainty that, no matter what anyone promised, not an article would ever be returned. Certainly he had a store full of beds and tables doing nothing, and certainly it was a pity that soldiers' wives should have to pay for dear furnished rooms instead of cheap unfurnished ones. But there was Form 1001, and I could not get him an inch beyond it. I admired him even in my defeat, and as we parted, the best of friends, he presented me with a conversational pearl beyond price. "Speaking to you as man to man, madam, I find, myself, that the root of the trouble in the married quarters is always the same thing—*feminine inertia, madam.* Good-morning!"

As I went down our narrow High Street, the jostle of bluejackets and men in khaki made it difficult to walk; reservists were being called up, coastguards being called out, excited women were at every door, anxious and conversational. The shop people seemed the most worried, as their stores were being sold out unexpectedly.

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They had the least cause to fuss of any one, had they known it, for they were to do a bigger trade in the next six months than they had ever expected to do in their lives, serving the new army in its thousands with the hundred and one little extras, as well as the necessaries of life in camp.

When the outdoor business was done, there were relays of people waiting to be seen at Government House. My brief orders were to tell no one anything, but to try and induce everyone who could to leave the town.

People don't like to turn out of their houses for nothing, and everyone wanted to find out all that they were not intended to know, and then give lengthy reasons for staying where they were.

Enormous hospital preparations had to be made in case of a sudden arrival of wounded naval men, and although this was not my business, I had more worry over it than over anything else, for one authority asked me to telegraph for an experienced matron, while another selected a local nurse for the post.

When there is nothing in particular going on, one asks one's husband's opinion and

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wishes; now, when big questions, of which I knew little, had to be settled at every turn, I only saw Chris for snatched moments, and could not bear to worry him. He slept in his office beside his telephone, and had his Staff with him at hurried meals. Orderlies interrupted, and telegrams arrived every moment.

It was South Africa all over again, only a thousand times more difficult, and also when the warning came to expect attack from the sea, it certainly seemed to be a thousand times more dangerous.

I don't know why danger for the many should be such a shock when personal danger has never greatly counted; but it was so, and the night when we shuttered the house and slept on the ground-floor, and had everything ready to go out at the first sound of shell fire, I felt sickened to my inmost soul —not because I was in the least afraid, but because we were not allowed to warn the townspeople.

Had I had my way, I should have cleared every house on the sea-front, and marshalled all the women and children by train to the next inland village. They would not have thanked me when morning came and no-

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thing had happened, and this might have been repeated over and over again at enormous cost and labour, and still have been quite useless. But one did not know all that during the first weeks of the war, and therefore my bitterest pangs were caused by feeling myself a traitor to the army if I betrayed the least sign of uneasiness to all the people who flocked about us for advice, and a double-dyed traitor to these same trusting souls who might save their lives if only they were warned in time.

Where was one's faith? I prayed, and prayed, and prayed again; in church once a day, and all day long in the house and in the street, and in our quiet garden walled by the sea. I had often read of a horrible spiritual darkness to which people are subject, but I never experienced it until this August—*then* I felt it and could scarcely bear my life for months after. I went on praying, but prayers seemed of no use; I went on going to church, going as I had loved to go all my life, and for all the comfort I got I might as well have gone to an empty barn. The magnitude of the misery caused by the war already, and the weight of woe

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yet to come, seemed to crush all light out of one's soul. People said, "How lucky you are that your husband is bound to stay in England, and your son's West Coast fever keeps him back for the present," and I had to smile and say, "Yes, indeed," but how can anyone rejoice that their beloveds are still safe if every day one's friends dearest and best are taken from them?

Only two thoughts helped me at all, and I think one or the other was constantly present to my mind: "In all their affliction He was afflicted." Then it could not be wicked to be afflicted oneself.

And George Eliot's wonderful passage, where she describes pretty Hetty Sorrel trying to rush away from her shame through the calm loveliness of the autumn fields, and is reminded of the Crucifix she had seen standing beside some blossoming orchard in France. "Truly mankind requires a suffering GOD." Yes—that struck the right note when every other sounded flat or false. We *do* need "a Suffering GOD," and come what may we cannot be called upon to suffer worse than He suffered for us.

I had wicker tables and deck-chairs put

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under the trees in our garden for the anxious Naval Officers' wives; they could have early tea on the lawn, without missing the first specks along the horizon which meant the returning Destroyers. It was better than standing about on the quay.

Leaning over the low wall by the lilac bushes and looking through a field-glass, it was possible to distinguish the officers on the bridge as each Destroyer passed in, and then to hurry along to the pier in time to welcome the first to come ashore.

One afternoon we achieved this beautifully, and in my unspeakable relief I even led off a cheer of joyful exultation as the obviously shell-spattered little ships came gallantly along in line; but the fishermen standing round were not jubilant, and as we saw stretchers being carried shoulder high over the gangway to the cruiser waiting in mid-stream, my voice and heart dropped suddenly.

"They *can't* be our men," said a young Lieutenant's wife protestingly. "The wireless said, 'No casualties'; someone said it did." But we had learned already that what someone said was generally untrue, and although it might be German wounded

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who were being lifted in that sad procession, and not our own Bluejackets, still the sun was darkened by the solemn sight, and we turned away.

"They are all in; I have counted them all," said the pretty young bride, who had picked out her own beloved, standing on his bridge, at least twenty minutes before.

"Why isn't the *Amphion* with them?" I demanded, seeking information without anxiety.

"Oh, she will be round the corner presently; she doesn't have to come in line exactly like the others," and we turned back in thankfulness.

But the fisher-folk had known better, and the reason they had not cheered was because they had heard more than we had.

It was true there had been a victory and a German cruiser sunk, but before night it was known to us all that the *Amphion* would return to harbour no more.

During these first tumults and upheavals and heartbreaks, the recruits for the new army came pouring in, thronging the streets, crowding the pavements outside the army quarters, and, from the General in his office, to the small bakers in their sleepy, old-

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fashioned shops, taxing all powers to the utmost to arrange for their immediate lodging and food.

The weather was wonderful; I never remember such cloudless sunshine, such a perfect holiday time as this August, when no one could take holiday. But it was perfect for sleeping in tents and living out of doors, and must have done the recruits and the recruiting a world of good.

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CHAPTER III

I HAD sent away the younger children the first day; now, according to order, and to set an example to the other officers' wives, I had to go myself, and my heart almost broke in the going. To work at one's post until one dropped was surely the ideal, the privilege, and the right of any soldier's wife who had gone through twenty-eight years with the army. In the South African war I had been sent for to go out and help—here, in England, I was sent away.

Compared to the poor Belgians fleeing for their lives from their shell-shattered homes, and pursued by the enemy's fire as they went, my home-leaving was very small beer, and I knew it; but, nevertheless, it was very bitter to me to go round the comfortable, familiar rooms—shuttering each window upstairs, and leaving the control of my dining-room, kitchens, and pantries to an unknown staff-officer. I would gladly have

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fed any number of men; but as I watched the long table being lengthened for their use I did not like to feel that I should sit there no more, and if a Mess in one's dining-room is nothing, I knew that the mess in the kitchen would be considerable. Chris laughed: "What on earth do the glasses and frying-pans matter?" he asked. Of course they didn't matter at all, even if the breakages were as complete as fresh servants without any supervision could achieve—no doubt £50 would buy new, someday, somewhere. But to go away and leave Chris behind, as well as the frying-pans, was a breaking up of foundations, and I wondered if we should ever have a home again.

There was a Naval Officer's house to let in a village nine miles off. It was easily taken by telegram, and there were no hardships to be faced; it was simply a matter of sentiment, shared by our cat, who went with me, and who swore for us both under every unfamiliar chair. Our five-year-old daughter summed up the situation in a sentence: "Father's a General now, but poor Muddis is only a refuzee." However,

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the new house was not a minute from the village station, and I could be in Harmouth by nine o'clock every morning, and as the garden and the study were not needed by the Mess, I could take my lunch there and still attend to a good many things, and also catch a fleeting glance of Chris as he crossed the lawn from his office or dropped into a deck-chair for a few minutes break. His day's work began before five o'clock in the morning and lasted well on to midnight, with telephone messages in the small hours as a common addition.

When Saturday came, he observed: "The War Office has sent me down a ripping car; I should think, if nothing happens here, that I might get out in it to Early Church with you to-morrow." This was more cheering, and Sunday morning dawned clear and still and lovely, and a big grey car glided up to the gate. The man who was driving it had a most delightful face, thin and brown, with eager eyes, which seemed to notice everything with an ulterior motive of helping wherever help was needed. Chris introduced him as Mr. Verney, the owner of the car sent down for his use, and observing

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that he must breakfast with us later on, was about to walk on with me to the village church close by. But the stranger might like to go with us, I thought; so I asked him, and when he said he should like to very much indeed, and later on, when I saw how he buried his face in his hands and obviously prayed with all his might, I felt greatly drawn to him—occupied though my thoughts were with a hundred friends in danger.

"Who is he?" I asked, as we turned back to the house, and Mr. Verney tactfully went on ahead to leave us a moment alone.

"Haven't an idea; but he is evidently a gentleman. Says he offered his car and his services as chauffeur to go out to the Front, but they gave him this job instead. I have given him a tent between our garden door and the office, and he will be uncommonly useful."

"But he will have his meals in the Mess, won't he?" I queried.

"Certainly not; I know nothing about him, and the great point of having the Staff Mess in our own house is—the privacy; he can get his food at the Three Crowns."

The Three Crowns is a very indifferent little inn with a rowdy bar, and it did not strike

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me as at all a nice place for Mr. Verney—but no doubt the Front would have been rougher; and I knew that argument was no way of soothing a very overworked General, who had been awaiting bombardment all the week, so we went quietly in to breakfast.

In an ordinary way, what a nuisance one might think a strange man if he had to be there during the only family meal we could have together, but we found directly that this man was so gentle, and understanding, and cheerful, that somehow he seemed just a nice addition instead of an interruption.

It was several weeks before I knew that Mr. Verney was an only son of an old family, and that he had thrown up important work, as well as all manner of good things, to come and do army chauffeur. He had tried to enlist first, but although I had taken him for a boy of twenty-two or three, he was really over thirty-five, and therefore beyond the August age limit. It was his extraordinary alertness and quick interest in everything which made him seem so young, and unlike other people. Most of us would think it sacrifice enough to be up at all hours and kept waiting about in all sorts of

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places, with horrid irregular meals at the "piggy" inn, and to be ordered about just as a chauffeur would be, but Oliver Verney proved himself to be a genius at finding extra jobs. He talked to the men who were digging trenches and making camp fires and guarding outlying places; he filled great baskets of fruit for them, took their letters to post, gave stray officers lifts when he knew the General could not want him, and even set to work with the hose on my poor flower-garden, which was rapidly going to ruin without master, mistress, or gardener.

As the days went on I did my letters and anything possible in the garden, which still seemed mine, although the house was not, and Mr. Verney, who had to wait about for my husband, often sat with me.

He was thirsting for the fray, and wild to get out to France, and presently, seeing the stuff he was made of, Chris took steps to try and get him a commission in the Mechanical Transport, where his exact knowledge of all the insides of motors, and his skill in driving, would be a real asset. There also came a proud day when he was told he might abandon the low pub and become a

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member of the Staff Mess. I really believe he was as pleased at that as if he were a boy just promoted into the school eleven, and before long they all loved him. When one of the officers had sudden orders for the Front, it was Mr. Verney who packed for him and rushed about to collect his things. When another had his wife down for a week-end, it was Mr. Verney who looked for rooms, and took them about in his car.

I had to give up the house I rented during August, and was still forbidden to return nearer Harmouth. Mr. Verney kept an eye on every conceivable nice-looking cottage or house for miles around, and surprised all manner of quiet Rectors and maiden ladies by dashing up to their doors in his car and asking them to let their houses to the General's wife. He put himself out so unlimitedly for the war, that he could not believe there could be anyone who wished to go on in their usual routine.

Not being in the least accustomed to army discipline, he was sometimes taken by surprise; but I never saw anyone more loyal or anxious to submit. He was to go off for an afternoon's leave to see an uncle one day,

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and I happened to be standing near when my husband said, "Be back by eight, Verney."

"Oh," he said (obviously rather disconcerted), "I thought you didn't want the car on Sunday after lunch."

"I don't; but you can't pass the sentries after dark."

"Oh, that will be all right, sir; they all know the car. I can warn them beforehand."

"You will be back by eight," said the General calmly, and passed on.

Mr. Verney looked rather pink under his tan, and I felt a little uneasy, but presently I made a wry mouth and remarked, "Discipline; isn't it a bore?" and at once he said,

"Oh, it's *quite* right."

I think it was only the next morning that he told me, with immense emphasis, that if the General were going to France he would go as his servant like a shot, and simply love it. "That's nonsense you know, of course; you must go out as an officer," I said.

"Oh, I don't care how I go if only I can

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get out, but I would give anything to go with him; surely they will send him soon?"

"Not while this place has any chance of being attacked."

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CHAPTER IV

THESE were the days of the retreat from Mons, when our hearts and brains were rocking with the knowledge of what our little Expeditionary Force was enduring across the water, and the Destroyer Flotillas were going in and out of the harbour, and constantly the telegrams at the office were warnings to be ready in case of the enemy's fleet appearing.

There were such racked nerves among the people who sat about in our garden waiting for news, it seemed amazing that the hollyhocks should still look so stately against the old brick walls, and the Red-Admiral butterflies go on feasting in such unconcerned numbers on the fallen pears.

I suppose the flowers and butterflies were still unconcerned in desolate Belgium, and I told myself that it was right that their beauty, which is surely a sign of God's love

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and care for the world, should remain undisturbed, no matter how men defiled and laid waste the earth. But what one tells oneself does not remain fixed in one's mind as convincingly as the instinctive pain which comes unsought.

The brightness of the garden turned my memory with a sudden leap to another August when I had been a little girl—only eight—and had waited anxiously for the clematis to blossom which hung above the library window in my first home. My father lay ill in the library, for he had tired of his bedroom, and liked to look along the garden from his couch and watch us playing through the window. I used to come to the verandah and peep in to see if he were awake, and to tell him which flowers had come out, and all the news of a child's world. But one bright August afternoon I came running in from a walk to be met by an aunt, who told me not to go to the library, nor make any noise, because my father was dead. Though I knew nothing of death, I was frightened and began to cry, and fearing the boys would see me and think me a baby, I ran out into the garden to hide my tears, and crouched behind

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some laurels in a dark shrubbery path. Presently I looked up towards the library window and saw that the long blinds were drawn and the bright evening sunshine was all shut out. That looked horrible to me, for father's blinds and windows were never shut; but when I saw that the sprays of the creeper had blossomed, the first flood of real grief swept over me.

"Oh James!" I cried out to the kind old gardener, who came to comfort me. "Oh James, James, Father's clematis has come out, and he is dead! He can't see it!"

The same heartaching sense of the untroubled beauty of the world struck me afresh as I stood in the dewy garden in the early morning and read the first Roll of Honour in the *Times*. There were the names of many we cared for who had fallen in battle.

Mr. Verney came across the garden presently, and we spoke together of those whom we had known. He was wild to rush out with his car and help, somehow, somewhere. "You are like John the Baptist," I told him.

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"John the Baptist!"

"Yes; you know he was one of the greatest born of women, but he never had any luck as this world counts it. That is why he has always been my favourite hero. Just think of the years he went about getting things ready, and then new and younger men were taken as disciples, while he was left and allowed to be sent to prison. It must have been simply frightful for him, and even when he sent a message, still he was not released, only told of the wonders that were being done out in the Front, where he could not see them."

"Dear me!" said Mr. Verney, "I never thought all that about him before, but it *was* frightful luck, certainly."

"The best people always have the worst troubles; but, at any rate, you won't have as bad a time as he had," I rejoined confidently, and then we began arranging letter-cards and cigarettes to give away in packets at the station; our first draft of men for the Front were leaving by the evening train.

Mr. Verney came with us to see them off, and to carry the trays of packages down the platform. I had pictured a tousled crowd

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and tumult of farewell such as I had seen when men were going out to the South African war. There had been some horrid sights then of men who had to be almost lifted into the train, and a clinging of weeping women in a crush that took one off one's feet. This was extraordinarily different. The station was closed to the public; the men's friends had not been told that they were leaving, and therefore the platform was empty, except for the draft and their kits, and a small group of officers.

I had expected to hand out my gifts in a quite informal way, but the Colonel gave an order, and a sergeant formed the men up in lines, so that I could shake hands and say a word to each in turn.

"Good-bye! God bless you!" How hard they wrung one's hand! How difficult the words were to say!

"Don't forget your prayers."

"I'm so proud to shake hands with you all."

"God bless you, dear men! Good-bye! Good-bye!"

"God bless you, madam!"

"Thank you."

"Thank you, madam. Good-bye!"

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They got into the carriages, and the ammunition was handed into the van.

"Now, Mr. Verney, the chocolates and cigarettes." A nice sergeant came up with a salute: "I should be sorry to miss my send-off, madam"—another warm grip of the hand, then the cheering began, and as the engine moved every voice took up the swinging "Long, long way to Tipperary," elevated now from a common patter song to the most poignant anthem of war. The train rounds the curve, and the waving hands and earnest faces pass out of sight—only the kind, elderly Colonel and his overworked-looking adjutant are left to turn away with us from the dusty, empty station.

They do not find it easy to train men and send them off, and then begin again and send more, over and over again, yet always have to stay behind themselves; but this is what happens at the back of the war, day after day, and without a steadfast back we can get no gallant front.

Cheers for the men who are going out? Yes, indeed, cheers from every fibre of one's soul, for "greater love hath no man than this, that he lay down his life for his friend";

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and we dare not expect to see half of their steady faces in any triumphal return in this world. But cheer again, although in silence, for the men who have to stay behind, yet would give everything they value in life if they might only go.

We walk back to the Mess for a few minutes before my local train is due to take me away for the night, and I look at "The Sistine Madonna" hanging above the mantelpiece, and "The Good Shepherd" over the writing-table; they would seem unusual pictures for an ordinary Mess dining-room, but they are not out of place in this one. The staff who break bread here are hard-working men without leisure or recreation, and they have left all sorts of pleasant homes and comforts to be "dug outs" for the war.

Give us dash and bravery and many a fine V.C., but give us also, oh Giver of every perfect gift, the elderly men who will rejoin the army to take orders from those who were once their juniors, to do the hack-work of the training camp, and the defences of our coast.

For each one of these also—the Marquis as Lieutenant-colonel, the Colonial Com-

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missioner as Captain—and many a hundred like them, are spending arduous days over the drudgery attendant upon the care of twenty thousand mixed recruits, who must be turned into twenty thousand disciplined men—without barracks or parade grounds, or one quarter enough subordinates to look into even such details as sanitation or blankets.

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CHAPTER V

We saw off many other drafts as the days went on, and improved our cigarettes by the addition of meat pies and apples. Mr. Verney enjoyed helping, but acknowledged that he grew more and more restless to go out, and felt himself of little use at home.

"You don't know half how useful you are," I told him in comfort, and also in truth. "Chris said only yesterday that you were as good to him as a son in the Mess, and that it was a rest just to go about with you, you drove so well, and were so quiet and careful and never bothered him with questions or made him a moment late."

"Did he say that? But those are such little things."

"Nothing is a little thing! Is it a little thing to send a telegram of congratulation? I made a big mess of one this morning! You know how we heard about the Destroyer who sank the German ship? The Com-

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mander's wife is such a darling, and she can't rush here like the other wives, because her baby is only a week or two old. I knew she must be deadly anxious, and I thought he might not be able to wire as soon as I could, so I just wrote down, 'Joyful thanksgiving for your husband's glorious victory,' and a horrid rough man standing in the post-office read it over my shoulder, and took a copy of my telegram before I could stop him. Chris will be so vexed; he won't allow any information to go over the wires about the ships."

Mr. Verney sympathised so heartily that I never tried to keep back from him either my failures or successes, and those heavy days were eased for me, as well as for Chris, by his keen appreciation of each difficulty as it came.

"It's frightful how careful you have to be," he agreed. "Did you hear about the Captain of that beautiful big cruiser in the harbour? Just as he was coming ashore yesterday, a tripper pointed to her, and asked him if he could tell him whether she were a Destroyer? 'Sorry, I have no idea,' he said, and walked gravely on."

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In return for this, and while he watered the garden, I told him the children's views on the death of slugs—a subject upon which Baby had discoursed to me just before they went away, when I was mourning over the ravages amongst my seedlings.

"*I* killed a snug the other day," Baby had observed gravely. "He *was* a monstrum—all black, a'cept pinky on his tummy, an' I waited an' waited ever such a long time, but I didn't see no great light come, nor no angels to take him up to God."

"I don't think slugs *do* go to heaven, Baby. You know you must love someone to be able to go there, and slugs don't love anybody at all."

"Not even their own babies?"

"No; they just leave them and go off by themselves."

But Judith had come up, and her sense of justice had led her to reprove us both.

"*They* can't help it; they didn't make theirselves slugs, and slug eggs don't want to be petted and looked after. Muddis 'd be just the same if she were one," she had stated.

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One cannot sit and grieve in these days, even if one's heart is cracking with anxiety, and one is turned out of one's home and separated from one's husband for what may so easily be the last months that we could ever again be together in this world.

One does not wish or expect to be happy when other women's husbands and sons are filling the lists of the fallen—one wishes and expects to suffer also; but still *Punch* has never been such a weekly blessing as during this war, and when anyone has told me a good story which I could pass on to make people smile, I have felt I owed him gold. The American girl's description of going to church, which I heard just then, was passed round the Mess with acclamation.

"My deur, you re'ly *should* have gone to that parade survice this mornin'! It was a real slap-up, dandy, smart littul survice, with a kurnel, in full uniform, readin' *see*lections from the Scriptures—off the back of a gilt eagul!"

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CHAPTER VI

"Draw near together; none be last or first,
We are no longer names, but one desire."
HENRY NEWBOLT.

THERE is much I could say about the alarms and the anxieties of these days, about hurried war weddings of young officers, which to me were infinitely more beautiful than the fuss and feathery sort—about the arrival of precious first babies, with no proud young Lieutenant to cheer his girl wife, but only agonised waiting for news of submarine H 4.

There is much that could be said, but it is safer to imitate the modest Oxford student's reply, when asked by the examiner what she knew of Herodias, "I know a good deal, but I would rather not talk about it."

One day as we waited in the car while the General went round the trenches, I told Mr. Verney that he reminded me of an old friend. We were drawn up at the side of what had

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recently been a peaceful ploughed field with a few cottages beside it, but which was now a horrible mass of barbed-wire entanglement with a deep covered trench running through it. The houses had their windows bricked up, and only loopholes for rifle fire were left in their place.

"You remind me of a man I knew in South Africa—Ralph Venning. He was younger than you are, but you are just the same sort of person."

Mr. Verney immediately proved the likeness by changing the conversation—his modesty had been one of the chief points of resemblance.

"How did you get on in Town yesterday?" he inquired.

"Oh it was very interesting—masses of men drilling everywhere, and all the taxis placarded with appeals to join the army at once. I went to lunch with a splendid friend of mine—Lady Harriet Brinsley. She is as brave as ten lions; all her four sons are fighting, and she has a notice right across her dining-room window reminding people to pray for the soldiers and sailors at twelve o'clock.

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"I saw old Cousin Minnie, too; she is an old pet really, but has been getting mixed and forgetful for a long time, poor dear. The last time I saw her she told me that there seemed to be a sad war going on, and that everyone ought to be very careful to economise, and that she had told her servants that all luxuries should be stopped at once, and *she* meant to begin by giving up the fire in the servants' hall—'And they seemed rather disagreeable about it, dear, which distressed me very much!'"

Mr. Verney was greatly taken with this.

"Oh, what a glorious old lady!" he said.

"She was a good deal more glorious yesterday," I returned, "only it seems a shame to laugh, because she can't help it; but she did not know me when I first came in, the room was rather dim, and she was confused:

"'Caroline, is it not, dear?' she said as I came towards her.

"'No, no, Cousin Minnie, it is Elizabeth; you know, Christopher's wife.'

"'To be sure, my dear. Poor Christopher! What an unfortunate marriage he made! Did he not?'"

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We both laughed over this until I had to wipe my eyes.

"What on earth did you say to her?" inquired Mr. Verney.

"Oh I told her that Christopher seemed quite happy and that it had really turned out better than one might expect, and she replied peacefully, 'Indeed, dear? You relieve me!'"

What nonsense one talks even when one's heart feels cracked in pieces, but it is a great blessing to be able to laugh, and when Chris heard about his unfortunate marriage the lines in his face were smoothed out and happy crinkles came round his eyes for several minutes. The dear old ladies were very worth while and "did their bit."

Mr. Verney went on steadily and quietly, doing everything for everyone, and when our own war wedding came, insisted on driving our son and his bride from the church, and came up afterwards to tell me how they went off from the station.

Most people think it a trying ordeal to attend the marriage of their only son, but I had to move house on the very same day.

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My naval landlord was due in harbour, and his wife must rush back to see him for any possible hour. Luckily, another Commander's house was vacant two miles away, so I took that, and went there directly after the Service. Chris and I and the girls had a rapid tea in the unfamiliar garden. Mr. Verney waited with his car, and by five they had motored back to duty, and our eldest girl had gone back to her hospital.

There was something terribly sad to me about my new quarters. The house had just been done up from top to toe by a happy young couple, who had evidently chosen every chair and table with care and pride—the bright new chintz, the pretty wall-papers and carpets went to my heart, and when I wearily turned upstairs to my bedroom and saw the picture of its lawful occupant opposite my bed—a fair-haired naval officer with a very tanned face under the peaked cap—I felt a wretched intruder and ashamed to take my rest while he kept lonely vigil on the North Sea.

Values are very relative in this world, and

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though my rent was paid in advance and the owner anxious to let, I was not foolish enough to think that I owed him no debt.

Even now, I doubt if a tenth of us have the least idea what we owe to our Navy. Even now, when we read of naval engagements almost weekly, and are allowed to see letters from the men who took part in them, printed in our *Times*, even now we never know the half they endure and take as a matter of course.

Down here, near the harbour, where the Cruisers and Destroyers come in and out, we know a little—never from any boasting or big talk—but just from scraps of accidental information.

I have given tea to a Commander who had just taken his ship into action after three nights and days on the bridge, and then after the engagement had kept all the watches for another night, until his gallant little Destroyer was safely brought into port; it was nothing accounted of—merely part of the job. His wife was sitting with me when he unexpectedly arrived, and his first re-

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mark after greeting her was so typical of the cream of our men :

"What's this I hear, Dear, about your having a sore throat? I met Nurse down the road with the babies, and she said your throat was bad."

The information about his own lack of sleep was dug out quite incidentally later on, and presently I received a really noble rebuke for attempting to discuss Naval matters which were too high for me.

I had already learned, after much exertion, that in these days if you are talking to officers you must never refer to the burning subjects of the times which are cracking your heart and head, but on this occasion I did just venture a comment on the glorious last signal from the *Formidable* which had been ringing in my brain for nights on end.

"We don't speak about these things," said the young Commander, smiling kindly as he spoke, but rising to take his leave. "We all hope to go the same way, but we never mention our losses."

He did not mean to crush me, but I *was* crushed, and infinitely uplifted also. I had

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heard of the purging power of war, on this day I saw it.

My new village, Trueford, had a beautiful Church—there was a spot of home there, at any rate—and an elderly Rector who might have been Mr. Keble, he cared so carefully for his people and services.

Every morning the bell rang for Early Celebration, every afternoon the village people climbed the hill for the evening intercessions. There was a list on the Church door of all who had gone from the parish to serve in the Army or Navy, and of friends serving, for whom prayers were desired; and when Sunday came the list was read out from the pulpit, and all stood to commend their men to the care of God.

Mr. Verney was quite excited about it as we walked back after service on Sunday.

"Now, that's something like a Church," he said, "and what a ripping old Parson! I would go twice every Sunday if other parsons were like that. Shan't you put the General down on his list?"

"Not until he goes to France. He would not like it."

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Only a few days later the grey car flashed down the drive. We rushed out, and Mr. Verney, shining with joy, told us that he was off; he had got his commission, and was on his way to Aldershot with the car—to go to France in a few weeks, or even less.

He had no time to come in, only a moment to say good-bye. "My luck has come at last," he said, radiant. "I hope I'll see the General there soon. They'll never keep him here much longer, unless there's invasion, and I don't believe there ever will be now. Good-bye. I can never thank you."

"Nor I you. God bless you, my dear. I am so glad, so very glad." But all the same it was hard to keep back a tear, and because when a man is going out to war there are things one cannot say, I kissed him for farewell.

There was hard work at Aldershot, but in a few weeks Mr. Verney was ready and had his orders for France. His heart's desire was just touching fulfilment when he picked up an evil type of tonsilitis germ which

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was prevalent among the crowded troops. There was violent pain, which grew more and more intense, hide it as he might, and the day he was to have gone to the Front he took a sadder journey to a London nursing home for an operation above the ear.

A letter came asking me to go and see him if I were in town. I was not in town, but I rushed up next day. The nurse who took me to his room said that the patient was doing quite satisfactorily, and would soon be up and about.

"Did you ever know such frightful luck!" said Mr. Verney, as he smiled a welcome; and when I answered quickly, "More like John the Baptist than ever," he laughed naturally, but as I looked at his poor bandaged head I felt my simile went too close, and I wished I had not said it.

Somehow we did not talk comfortably that morning. Although the nurse had spoken as if the illness were quite trifling, I had not been told what the operation was, and I did not think it could be good for him to see visitors, though he seemed to have been well enough to be reading the news-

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paper before I came in. So I only stayed a few minutes, and we only talked small talk—just about his date for going to the sea to convalesce, and how we all missed him still. But he did not say anything about going to the Front later, and I feared he felt the postponement too deeply to speak of it.

"Tell me about the children," he said; for the little ones had come back to us at Trueford, and made great friends with him.

"They are quite blooming. Baby brought home a new prayer she had thought out for herself, and says it every night: 'Bless King George. May he reign above us for ever and ever, and make him win the war. Amen.' And now she adds a little more: 'And take care of all the soldiers and sailors in the trenches, and bring them safe home, an' live happy ever after. Amen.'"

Mr. Verney loved children, and carried about with him a snapshot of his small nephew, with a text-hand letter beginning, "My dear Oliver," without any "Uncle."

When I got home that evening I wrote in a note what I had felt too tongue-tied to say—that anyone would sooner have a bit

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of German shell in them than the evil germ which he had picked up in camp, and that he must measure things by loss and not by gain; "not by the wine drunk, but by the wine poured out," and that no one wounded in Flanders had poured out more than he had.

It was a glorious autumn morning when a letter came a few days later, which I opened cheerfully, saying, "Ah, here is news of Mr. Verney," but it began:

"You were so fond of my brother, I know you will be sorry to hear——"

"Oh no, *no*, not dead!"—Not really gone beyond the calm sunshine of our familiar autumn day? Yes, he was gone. Without any wound of bullet or of shrapnel to bear with pride—and how proudly he would have borne one,—Mr. Verney had laid down his life for his country.

There had been fresh agonising pain, and then a second operation on the kind head, which always felt and thought for others, and then he had fallen on sleep. No—not sleep:

"He had awakened from the dream of life."

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Shelley surely touched the truth when he wrote that line. The Life Beyond *must* be our real life, and this only the dream or foretaste, otherwise God is less kind than we are. It cannot be that He gave us hearts to love and eyes to see, and memory to delight in the dear, familiar beauties of this world, *only to take it all away from us.* Why, no common earthly father would watch his son's delight in the sounds and sights of each return of spring and summer and not be pleased by it, and surely the Creator of it all must care more that the work of His hands should be appreciated?

The cooing of the wood pigeons returning to nest in the same old tree near the window, the pairing of the partridges, the sight of the first Orange-Tip butterfly—how dear all these are to us, and how we know it as a sure sign that our boy is keeping clean at heart, because he notices and cares for them all each time he comes home.

How should death be an end to such pure joys as these, when Christ has conquered death?

A young soldier said to me once, "I wish

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the Bible didn't say there is to be a new heaven and a new earth. It doesn't matter much how new the heaven is, but I do want the old earth, just exactly like this one, not a bit new."

I believe we have taken St. John too literally. A new earth? Why, God makes it new every spring—new leaves, new grass, new flowers—every one of them radiantly, gloriously new, and yet so exactly the same that you cannot find the faintest difference between the primroses in this year's copse and those you raced to be the first to find forty years ago.

No, we are but dust and feeble as frail; but it is envy and hate and the contagion of the world's slow stain that we shall leave behind us for ever, not these.

Dear Oliver Verney, the stain had not gone deep with him—I never even saw it; but he did love the flowers and gardens and country, and he cannot have left them for ever, because he preferred duty to ease—no.

"To the saner mind
We rather seem the dead who stay behind."

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This was All Saints' Day. Winter came on dark and wet, and it was Epiphany before a sudden break came in the clouded heaviness of spirit which had oppressed me since the first day of war.

Then, like David, having held on to the habit—the best habit I know—of going into the House of the Lord, I seemed in a flash to understand these things, partly at any rate. We had come to the Athanasian Creed—never beloved by me, and often a cause of trouble on festivals when people who one felt sure would be repelled by its assertions, had been specially coaxed to come to church. But it had to be said, for Baby was insistent to follow, and my finger had to point the way. We came laboriously through the long words and much repetition to a familiar sentence, which as suddenly dispersed my gloomy doubts as though I had never heard it before and it had been a message fresh from heaven.

"The Father incomprehensible. The Son incomprehensible. The Holy Ghost incomprehensible."

Why, there was the answer to all my tor-

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ment—*Incomprehensible*—while I, poor fool, had been battering my finite wits in efforts to understand the Infinite, still bruising my feminine and most incomplete comprehension against *The Incomprehensible.* I saw it all in one dazzling flash of insight.

Down from the painted windows the shafts of light, stained pink and blue, still fell athwart the aisle, and little jewelled patterns ran across the pews. The business-like voices of the choir continued to chant the Creed, while various members of the congregation closed their lips and declined to assert that this was the Catholic Faith, which except a man believed faithfully he could not be saved. But for me, Athanasius had brought daylight, serene and clear, where all before was dark. In my heart I said, "You cannot comprehend God, you are not meant or made to comprehend God, but you *can* trust God." And the answer went up joyfully, "Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him."

From that moment the oppression lifted. The war might remain, might grow worse, might sweep one's all into its fearful net,

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yet life looked clearer than ever before—a shining road which glistened after rain.

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Now the time of the singing of birds is here, and the Roll of Honour still grows longer with the days. The very flower of England are laying down their lives as freely as the scattered blossoms of the spring.

I go up to the little Church to daily prayer. My husband's name is on the List now, and the boy's is to be added very soon. I hear again the story of John the Baptist, while my heart repeats a modern version. I hear the rector—the Keble of the village—read yet another story: the story of the mother of two men; how she came to ask that her sons might be promoted, and was told that she knew not what she asked.

She did not know, and we mothers and wives do not know either. We can but kneel and worship as she did, and beg for the best for our beloveds—we know not what.

But our men are hearing the same great

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question that was asked of the sons of Zebedee: hearing it above the roaring of the sea as the Navy goes out to fight, hearing it above the sound of battle as the regiments stream out, battalion after battalion, to the Front.

. . . . . .

"Are ye able to drink of the cup that I shall drink of?"

And they say unto Him: "We are able."

THE END

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